



NEW YORK CITY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Annual Highlights 2020

Despite the pandemic and the disruption resulting from it we were able to continue our partnerships with the SWIM Coalition, NY NJ Harbor & Estuary Program, Lower Hudson Coalition of Conservation Districts and others to focus our efforts on education, outreach and policy initiatives. Urban Soils Institute successfully hosted a series of virtual events for the Annual Symposium and expanded its partnership to more organizations around the country. We made lemonade out of lemons in 2020!

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

CSO Monitoring

For a variety of reasons, the District revised this project to partner with the Guardians of Flushing Bay and Temboo (an organization that provides technical assistance on data collection and analysis) to monitor a CSO outfall in Flushing Creek. Instead of a webcam to record CSO discharges, we will install sensors to continuously monitor turbidity and conductivity. Correlated with the precipitation data from the nearby LaGuardia Airport, we hope to identify CSO signatures. We will be installing the sensors in March 2021.



GI Virtual Tour

The District had to abandon the bus tour in 2020 but was able to create virtual tours with four sites featuring green infrastructure. The sites are: NYC Parks Citywide Services Complex, Bronx River Foodway, Randall’s Island Park Living Shoreline and Randall’s Island Park Freshwater Wetland. At each site the video features a site interpreter with deep knowledge of the project.

DEC Endorsed 4-Hr Construction Site Inspection Training

The in-person workshop scheduled for mid-March was cancelled. However a handful of participants took advantage of the online workshop offered by the Conservation Districts Employees Association.

Stormwater Infrastructure Matters Coalition

The District continued to serve on the Steering Committee, providing feedback and direction for the Coalition Program Manager. SWIM focused much of its work on a few policy issues in 2020. SWIM participated in the Rise to Resilience Coalition with a focus on green infrastructure at the land-water interface (i.e., wetlands). SWIM also served as a member of the Green Roof Tax Abatement Working Group, which continued its work assisting the City in the development of priority abatement districts. SWIM also tracked progress on the water rate restructuring study undertaken by the DEP and its consultant.

Lower Hudson Coalition of Conservation Districts

The District continued its leadership role on the Steering Committee. The stormwater conference transitioned to a virtual conference over four days. We were able to provide professional development credits to engineers and landscape architects and the sessions were well attended.

New York New Jersey Harbor & Estuary Program

Shino continued to work closely with the Citizens Advisory Committee leadership team. In 2020 HEP CAC officially began a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) initiative, starting with a survey of its members and an annual conference with the theme of DEIJ. HEP CAC now has a DEIJ subcommittee on which Shino serves.

Shino also served on the Water Quality Working Group and attended the Management Committee meetings.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

NYC Envirothon

NYS Conservation Districts Employees Association successfully held a virtual Envirothon as Regional Envirothons. Seven teams from five schools in New York City participated. Three of the five boroughs were represented.

The winning teams participated in the State Envirothon (also virtual) and Stuyvesant High School and Staten Island Technical High School won second and third place for the first time in the history of NYS Envirothon! It was certainly a bright spot in an otherwise challenging year!

NYC Outdoors: Environmental Education Expo

Unfortunately we were not able to pull together the Expo as a virtual event. Hopefully in 2021 we will have a virtual Expo featuring a multitude of virtual resources that became available since the pandemic started.

School requests

Before the pandemic shut down schools, Shino had a chance to participate in the Wave of Action Partner Fair (a professional development event for teachers) to

make a presentation on water quality at the Genovese Environmental Center.

Shino also continued her participation in the Citizen Science Teacher Experimentation Program (CSTEP), led by the NYC Dept of Education, as a resource specialist providing assistance to science teachers. As part of this partnership project, Shino attended the Culturally Relevant Education Symposium for STEM educators in January. After a brief hiatus to allow teachers to transition to remote teaching, the CSTEP resumed in fall 2020 via virtual meetings.

In May, Shino successfully led a virtual water testing session with 6th graders from 75 Morton Middle School in Manhattan. She demonstrated how to measure the salinity and dissolved oxygen of the Hudson River water using a pre-recorded video and real time sampling in the office.

In October, Shino participated in the Day in the Life of the Hudson River by videorecording water testing on Pier 45. The video has been edited for use in virtual field trips, to be developed for 2021.

URBAN SOILS INSTITUTE

Soil Testing

There were a couple of dozen samples or so that were processed as usual for XRF heavy metal screenings, pH analysis, Total Dissolved Solids and NPK analyses before the pandemic shut down the operation. We managed to conduct a couple of site visits in February. A visit to the Gowanus Bay Terminal had the USI Team involved in multiple meetings, research and testing of the compost for cadmium

Workshops

We had several of our established annual workshops scheduled through May. Alas the workshops had to be canceled. Luckily we were able to develop virtual

workshops to be included as part of the month-long Annual Urban Soils Symposium.

Four symposium workshops were offered over four Saturdays in October, covering a wide range of topics from exploring the intersection of art and science in “Dirtball & Multi-Species Spa,” a virtual tour of a garden with horticulturalists, to “Soils Alive” on soil organisms and “Soils & Energy: A Discussion About The Energy Flows of Soil and Everything It Touches.” Each workshop was attended by approximately 20 participants via Zoom. We were able to host one in-person, socially distanced workshop on soil testing on Governor’s Island.

Partnership Building

At the same Culturally Responsive Education symposium for STEM educators event, George connected with a NYC Department of Education representative who is very interested in our Every Kid Outdoors project in partnership with the National Park Service. Before the pandemic, we were in full-swing planning to provide workshops for teachers in soil science and field trips to fourth graders in NYC public schools.

We also developed a new partnership with Tree People in Los Angeles, which opens doors for exciting new education and outreach opportunities.

Urban Soils Education

George was able to utilize his teaching position with the New York Botanical Garden to create wonderful opportunities for partnerships and requests for our services. The staff at the Everett Children's Adventure Garden at NYBG asked George to give a workshop for their teachers and provide them with tips for teaching children soil science. It would have developed into a more robust partnership program but the pandemic has put a pause on it for the remainder of 2020.

For the Every Kid Outdoors National Park Service project, we had ~250 students lined up from two schools just for the month of May, with another dozen schools waiting to be scheduled. Unfortunately the in-person programming had to be suspended. We began working with the partners on transitioning to virtual programming.

Annual Urban Soils Symposium

We were able to successfully transition our symposium to a virtual platform. Every Friday in October from 2 to 6PM, we hosted a panel of speakers followed by robust discussions by all participants. We organized the panels by themes, which included: Rights of Soil, Symbiogenesis, Gut Instinct and Gardenator.

Because of the virtual platform we were able to draw presenters and participants from all around the world, which enabled us to have great discussions with diversity of perspectives.